

THE CAGE: EXPERIMENTS OVER DOCUMENTATION / KATHMANDU (NEPAL)



2075: CIVIL PRESS

NOVEMBER 2018

PROJECT DOSSIER



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CALL OUT

Workshop
2075 CIVIL PRESS: THE CAGE

ROHAN THAPA | ALEJANDRO ACÍN | JULTÁN BARÓN

24 - 30 Oct 2018 | 10am - 5pm

<http://www.photoktm.com/2018/workshops/civil-press-zine-making/>

School of Arts, KU, Hattiban

THE CAGE / NEWSROOM is a collaborative workshop that encourages local citizens to visually respond to contemporary socio-political issues. By activating an ongoing archive composed of official, unofficial, cooperative, community, and personal images – both physical and digital, participants will produce an experimental and public intervention to disseminate the results.

2075 Civil Press, the workshop's theme for Photo Kathmandu 2018, aims to address the paradigm of time as a constantly spinning helix, a natural cycle recurring ad-infinitum. Nepal, a diffuse territory long ensnared in political tensions with India and China, and with a modern history marked by absolute monarchy and a recent civil war, has synthesized its identity primarily through rituals, religion, language, and nature. In today's global age, tourism, agriculture, and labour migrations are among its chief socio-economic drivers, and the society faces a constant pressure to re-imagine itself.

In today's social climate, traditional cultural values come into conflict with the demands of development and modernization. The current societal shift in which "contemporary social changes are characterized by the waning of pre-capitalist political-economic forms, the growth of a market economy, democratization and associated new forms and freedoms for individualistic self-expression" (Boyce and Coyle, 2015) demands that cultural practitioners examine existing power structures and engage with changing ideas of individualism, not least of which are social norms regarding gender, sexuality, and marriage.

In pursuit of a more egalitarian ideal, THE CAGE / NEWSROOM propose a collective visual analysis, which entails understanding how social identities come to exist in relation to one another; how those social interactions produce marginalization and prosperity for different groups; and how unequal power structures are sustained, reconfigured and reproduced over time.

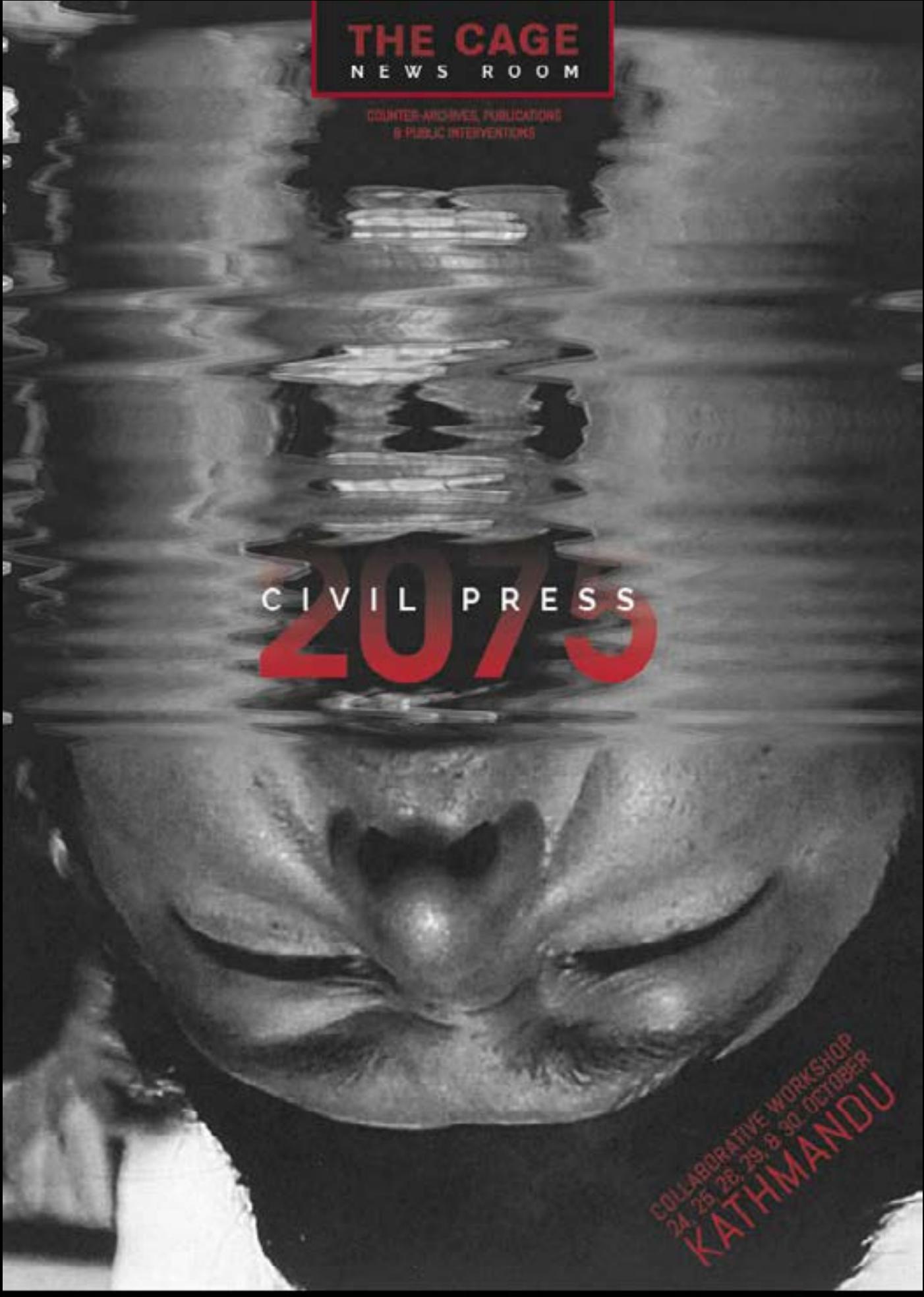
WHO SHOULD APPLY?

Nepali visual practitioners who are interested in telling contemporary socio-political stories.

WORKSHOP DETAILS

Dates and times:

24 - 25 - 26 Oct: 10am - 5pm
27 - 28 Oct: shooting days



THE CAGE

NEWS ROOM

COUNTER-ARCHIVES, PUBLICATIONS
& PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS

CIVIL PRESS
2013

COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOP
24-25-26-27-28-29-30 OCTOBER
KATHMANDU



NEPAL POINT



PHOTOGRAPHY ART CENTER

photo.circle



ARCHIVAL X-RAY

2075
Civil Press
archive.



My name is Nirvan Shrestha

My name is Nirvan Shrestha.

I am 6 year old.

I live in New Baneshwari.

My principal name is Sampauna Devapate.

I like pizza, momo, somosa, saswge
and potato and spinach.

My mother name is Nirmala
- joshi Shrestha.

My father name is sanjay
(Bijay) Shrestha.

OVERVIEW

THE CAGE: 2075 CIVIL PRESS Experiments over documentation

2075 Nepali Archive was born in October 2018, two years after the conversation between Julián Barón and Rohan Thapa. 2075 NA has the intention to use images that have had a circulation, a past life. By using a photo copy machine this images survive bringing new meanings. Any document that is photocopied is converted into an imagetext file, that is reborn, free and expands the characteristics of the image. We could say that the images form new life, samsāra.

2075 NA aims to address the paradigm of time as a constantly spinning helix, a natural cycle recurring ad-infinitum. Nepal, a diffuse territory long ensnared in political tensions with India and China, and with a modern history marked by absolute monarchy, civil war and democracy, has synthesized its identity primarily through rituals, religion, language, and nature. In today's global age, tourism, agriculture, and labour migrations are among its chief socio-economic drivers, and the society faces a constant pressure to re-imagine itself.

2075 NA serve the purpose of civil visual liberation, by establishing a platform wherein the citizens of Nepal contribute to create a visual archive. The labor behind the Archive is focused on working with images reproduced by xerography, as a conscious act to democratize photography and create a proletariat archive of working class images. Experiments over documentation.

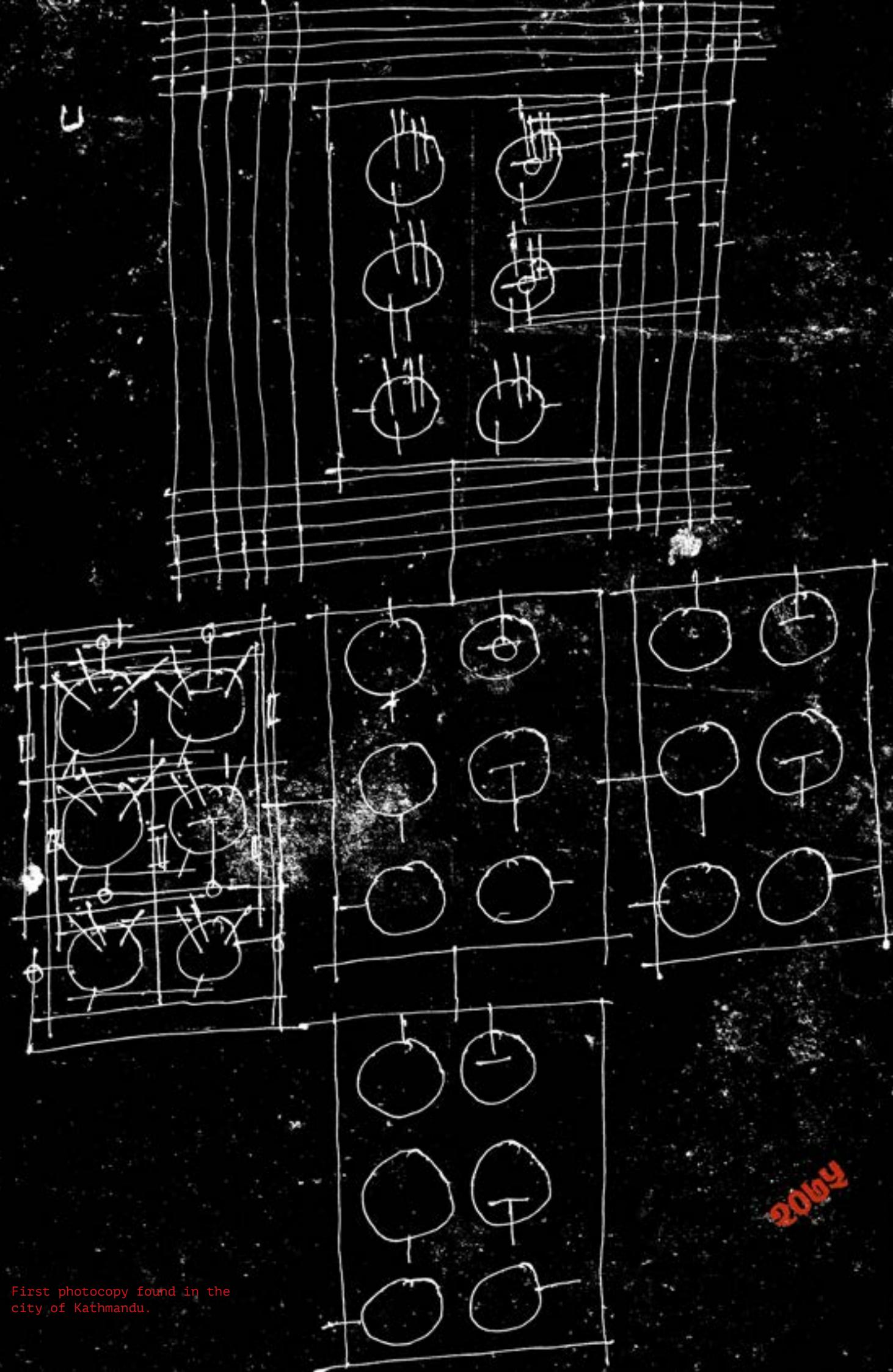
Within the workshop program of PhotoKathmandu 2018, THE CAGE: 2075 CIVIL PRESS coordinated by Alejandro Acin (IC-Visual Lab), Julián Barón and fixed by Rohan Thapa (Nepal Point, Photography Art Center), in collaboration with students from Kathmandu University School of Arts and Education.

In Kathmandu, THE CAGE's team behaves like a NEWSROOM encouraging local citizens to visually respond to contemporary socio-political issues. By activating the 2075 NA which is composed of official, unofficial, cooperative, community, and personal images - both physical and digital, where participants have produced an experimental publication and series of public interventions to disseminate the results.

In this edition THE CAGE has been focused

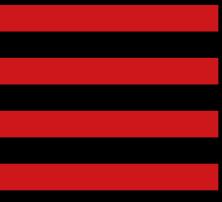
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THE CAGE TEAM: Rohan Thapa, Sarbesh Dhungana, Sujan Chitrakar, Alejandro Acin, Anjila Manandhar, Hitesh Vaidya, Julián Barón, Diwas Maharjan, Tashi Lama, Nikash Yonjan, Rupesh Man Singh, Riya Dhungel, Pooja Duwal, Yashaswee Shrestha and Sujaan Shrestha.



First photocopy found in the
city of Kathmandu.

2004



PUBLICATION TEXTS



मेरो आवज र द्रढता -बास'देब अधिकारी

जिवन गराई, भोगाई र हेराईको त्रिवेणि हो । जिवनमा धेरै किसिमका च'नैतिहरु आ(उछन् । त्यस्ता क'रालाई सामना गर्दै सहि ढूँगले जिवन सपार्न हामि द्रिड भएर लाग्न' पर्दछ । अपाढ्हगता भएका व्यक्तिहरुको अवस्था अभाव, दबाव र प्रभावमा श्रिर्जी रहेको छ । हाम्रो देश पनि रोग, भोग र शोकले आकान्त भएको छ । यस्तो बखतमा के गर्ने, कसो गर्ने भन्ने क'रा हाम्रो मानष पटलमा छछल्क रहन्छ । हामी सबैले क'नै पनि काम गर्दा दश चोटी सोच्ने, पाच चाटी विचार गर्ने र एक चोटी निर्णय गर्ने बानि बसाल' पर्दछ । क'नै पनि काम गर्दा हत्तारमा निर्णय गर्ने र फ'संतमा पछ'ताउने काम कहिल्यै गर्न ह'दैन । हामीले हरेक निर्णय गर्दा आबेकले हैन, त्रिवेकले निर्णय गर्न पर्दछ । भकम्प गईसकेपछि मेरो मनमा एक किसिमको डर उत्पन्न भएको थियो । भकम्प जाने दिन बिहान ध'लिखे लमा रहेको ग्रेस एफेम १०७६ मेगाहर्जको छैटौ तल्लामा करवि विहान ११ बजे प'गेको थिए । त्यो दिन एफेमको प्रविधिक साथि स'रज श्रेष्ठले खाना खानको लागि मलाई पटक पटक आग्रह गर्न' भयो तर मैले खाना खान अस्वकार गरे । त्यो दिन म संग मेरो स्वयम सेवकको रूपमा स्नातक तहको तेस्रो वर्षमा हृष्ययन गर्ने छविलाल देवकोटा नाम गरेको भाई प'ग्न' भएको थियो । उहा जिवनमा त्यो दिन पहिलो पटक ध'लिखेल जान' भएको रहेछ । त्यहि दिन मैले एक जना साथिलाई मेरो कार्यक्रमको अथिति बनिदिन' ह'नको लागि आमन्त्रण गरेको थिए । उहा पनि आउन' भयो । त्यसपछि मेरो प्राविधिक मित्र मेरो लागि क'सिं र माईक मिलाउन स्टोडियो भित्र छिन' भयो । एकछिन पछि प्रलय कारि भकम्प जना स'रु गर्यो । स'रुमा त मैले बोलाएको साथिले टेबल बजाउन' भएको जस्तो लाग्यो । तर पछि सबै जना बराएको आवाज स'विन थाल्यो । त्यस पछि सबै जना कराएको आवाज स'निन थाल्यो । त्यस पछि भकम्पको कम्पन मजा संग ह'न थाल्यो । म र मेरो स्वयम सेवक साथि कल्याण श्रेष्ठ म संग त्यो दिन पहिलो भेट भएको थियो । उहाले पनि मदृत गर्न' भयो । अरु केहि साथिहरु कता भाग्न' भयो मैले थाहा पाउन सकिन । हामि तल झर्दा दाया बाया, अगाडि पछाडि सबै तिरबाट सिसाहरु भरिरहेका थिए तर इयाल भत्केर खसेको सिसाले हामिलाई लागेन । मेरो प्रविधिक साथि चाहि स्टोडियो मै बस्न' भयो । एक छिन पछि हामि सबै तल झर्यो । तल झर्दा बाईकहरु बेतोर संग क'दिरहेका थिए । एम्ब'लेशको हरण र मानिसहरुको हो हल्ला पनि कानमा ग'न्जी रहे । त्यो कालि लागदो दृष्ट देख्दा मलाई लाग्छ हामिले कहिले पनि भत संग डुराउने,(वर्तमानमा कराउने र भविष्यमा हराउने बानि गन' ह'दैन । हामिले जिवनमा जहिले पनि पिरको सट्टा परिश्रम गर्ने त्यस्तै गरि चिन्ताको सट्टा चिन्तन गर्ने बानि बसाल' पर्छ । जहिले पनि मस्तिष्कमा समझदारि, काधमा जिम्मेवारि, दयमा इमानदारि र व्यवहार मा वफादारि रहेर काम गर्न' पर्दछ । शान्त सम'न्द्रमा ड'डूँगा चलाउने माझि कहिल्यै क'सल माझि बन्न सक्दैन । एउटा क'सल माझि बन्नको लागि जिवनको संघर्ष रूपि सम'न्द्रमा पैडन जान्न' पर्दछ । त्यस पछि मात्र जिन्दिगिको सफल यात्रामा डैडन सकिन्छ । त्यसैले एक जना मात्र ढैडदैमा म प्रथम भए र तिन जना बिच ढैडदैमा म त्रितिय भए भन्ने क'रामा कहिल्यै गर्व गन' ह'दैन । यति क'रा सोच विचारका साथ गरियो भने हामि पक्कै सफल ह'न्छै । तसर्थ मलाई जिवनमा के लाग्छ भने देशको तिम्ति हामि चेतनाको ज्वति वालि अपाढ्हग सपाढ्हग द'बै बद्धौ, एक साथ कदम उचालि ।

'I don't have faith in this thing called God,'

Conversation with Parijat from 1963 Parijat on literature, marriage and faith

WRITTEN BY
UTTAM KUNWAR

Sisal is a type of tree known for being hardy. Sisal is also a name of a woman but her body, despite her age, is anything but hardy. The Sisal tree is naturally wooden but Sisal...full of soft feelings, a pure flower, a delicate woman...I believe that humans are supreme creations otherwise Sisal would be born in a dog's society...

The blossoming of a flower - is that the only purpose in life? Sisal, doesn't the wind have a right to blow? Have faith in the wind as well! You know what Sisal, why don't you just accept the wind? You have also turned into an animal, having grown up in this animalistic society. For once...for once Sisal, just accept ruin. Perhaps you won't cry then...

Do you love me?

What a meaningless question..My love is not enough, is it?

That means...you will marry me, right?

Listen, I will marry a man whom I have never seen before....And he has to be able to demonstrate his cruelty and savagery on the wedding night itself. If he attempts to understand my psychology, he will also be defeated, forever defeated. Do you not understand? I don't believe in love!

Sisal!

I have accepted the necessity of marriage but I don't believe in surrendering.

Sisal, is this your...

Yes, this is my only conclusion so far.

An excerpt from Parijat's Ek Kathin Niskarsha, published in Ruprekha

And this is also Parijat's only conclusion so far.

"I'm not against marriage as long as there is mutual love and understanding. But I cannot submit myself. I cannot destroy my humanity; neither can I allow someone else to destroy it. To be completely honest, I despise the notion of offering one's body. Perhaps this is because of my superiority complex."

It is possible that this is due to her superiority

complex. But it's not that Parijat doesn't want to get married at all. If someone with all the qualities she desires shows up she will consider marriage. In fact, there is someone in her life whom she considers to be "the one," but the issue of marriage has been lingering for a while. Bhupi Sherchan, Madan Regmi and others have been associated with Parijat, but marriage is an altogether different ballgame; these men are friends only. And it's possible that they do not have the qualities desired by Parijat.

"Life is worthless, but it can't be ignored. What I think of life is- it's certainly not a joyful experience; humans are born to suffer. Humans have to endure suffering at every stage. One can invent any excuse to survive but whatever excuse one makes, life is very sad; life is purposeless. Even after knowing this, I make several excuses to live and I am capable of making excuses. That's why there is no point complaining either. So whatever happens, I quietly tolerate and let it be." Sukanya and I have been listening to Parijat's speech.

But her speech hasn't ended yet- "I don't think humans are inherently good. In comparison, I respect and love dogs equally because I have become disillusioned with humans."

"Why..." I want to find out her complete reasoning behind this but Parijat interjects, perhaps having sensed my intention, "I have understood people very well, based on my own perspective. Because of our mental prowess and intelligence, we are capable of being extremely knowledgeable; and that's how I encountered negative traits such as dishonesty and pride. Maybe that's why there is disillusionment in me." This is Parijat's point of view and also Sisal's attitude. Sakambari and Suyogbir [characters from her novel Sirishko Phool] have similar perspectives.

I ask, "Why have you mixed yourself with your characters in this way, Parijat-ji? Why did you make each one of them your mouthpiece? Why did you turn Sirishko Phool, Ek Kathin Niskarsha and your poems into your life story?" My questions are not a reproach or a complaint, just sincere curiosity.

Sukanya has been embroidering a handkerchief. I am sitting by a window. And in the empty space between us, there is a floor-cushion on which Parijat is sitting.

"None of my work is my life story, but I did make Sisal, Sakambari and Suyogbir speak my thoughts. Basically, when it comes to life principles, I don't find much difference between theirs and mine." After saying this, Parijat becomes quiet. I also remain quiet but am thinking to myself, "There isn't much difference in their daily lives either."

And I remember Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who said, "If a poet divides herself into two parts- person and poet- then she will definitely murder her artistic self." Perhaps this is the reason why Parijat hasn't committed suicide yet. And perhaps Parijat will never commit

suicide because I am hearing Parijat say it herself, "This is it for humans. I think this is all we know. And so I have accepted life the way it is and how it is. After all, what are humans anyway? And why should I obey them? I get mixed emotions and that's why I don't get too negative either. And so, I don't want to die just like that."

A boy enters Parijat's room, carrying flowers. He knows that Parijat likes flowers. He also knows that this is why Parijat named herself after a flower (a flower that can only be picked after it has fallen, a flower that cannot be touched in its youth, a dead flower picked by Arjun and brought to Kunti so that she could worship Mahadev- that's Parijat.)

Inside Parijat's room lotus and sarwada are arranged neatly on a table; the Parijat flower is not there. In fact, the flower is never placed inside any hotel or club for decorative purpose; Parijat herself is never seen inside these venues. I know that Parijat doesn't like to visit or frequent such places. It's not that she cultivated these habits in the last three years; she was like that even before these three years.

Three years.

One instant. One moment. One era.

Parijat spent all that time inside one small room, like a prisoner. Prisoner of rheumatism. A tall wall at the end of a long street in front of the room- this is the limit of Parijat's vision. The tall trees standing next to these tall Singha Durbar walls; the spring that graces these trees and the birds twittering and enjoying the spring. Happiness everywhere; delirious birds in flight; and Parijat's imagination in flight, always in flight- in the form of poems, stories, novels and now as a one-act play.

A doctor comes regularly to check in on Parijat and Parijat regularly goes to Shanta Bhawan for check-ups. This sequence of back and forth continues; so does Parijat's rheumatism. It's a parallel progression. Time passes-one, two, three days, a month, a year and then three years.

Tears flow for Parijat.

Pity descends upon Parijat.

A petition gets registered for Parijat.

A team of representatives gets mobilized for Parijat.

The wheels keep turning, Parijat keeps on looking, listening to all this, can't remain true to herself. Anger arises inside her, frustration increases and she gets bitter, towards herself and towards her sympathizers because Parijat knows how cheap people's tears are, how cheap 'pity' is, and in this way, how cheap everything is.

I have been looking out of Parijat's window at the empty street. Sukanya's handkerchief is not complete.

And out of Parijat's mouth, "It will be exactly three years this March since I have been shut inside a room. I can't survive on pity and sympathy; that's why I don't want to advertise my inconvenience. I am unable to provide pity and sympathy to others as well. That's why I deeply resent and reject the emotions thrown at me by the literary community. I have accepted my disease as part of my life." This is how time has been passing.

"My younger sister Sukanya is mad after literature and nationalism and she takes my existence better than (sic) of her own. She loves me like anything. I, who hate parasitism in love and maintenance, am a real parasite of her..." [An excerpt from Parijat's autobiography, written in English] I have been reading, and I reread it, this time in a clear voice so that people who might be listening can understand. And then I look at Parijat's face. I sense gratitude. My eyes hover around and land on Sukanya's face. Her face becomes red- a beautiful mixture of shyness and acknowledgement. I ask Parijat, "This is it?"

"No, apart from Sukanya, I am also grateful to Dayasingh Miss for letting me lengthen my life."

"And maybe some others?"

"Yes, towards my own life and with my faithlessness with life."

"Faithlessness..."

"Faith is an experience that has no identity. It might work only for cowards and for people who have no self-esteem. That's why I don't have faith in this thing called God. I don't have faith in life either and I don't believe in this notion of belonging to someone."

"Parijat prefers philosophy to literature, right?"

Her response, "I am more of a literary person; philosophy is just a subject of interest but literature is my life."

"How did that happen?"

"I started writing in order to remove a worry that was inside me..."

"And how did you start publishing?"

"When I was doing my Intermediate studies, Chittaranjan-ji came to teach Sukanya. At that time, I had written two or three poems. Chittaranjan-ji saw them and said, "I like them, I will publish them." He took the poems and later Dui Kabita got published in Dharti around 1957.

My response comes in the form of "Oh..." Then I start speaking, "Parijat-ji, how do you view literature these days?"

The answer I get is, "I consider literature a major part of civilization. A nation cannot develop without

the development of literature. That's why literature is an inseparable part of a nation."

"How much do you trust yourself to develop literature?"
"I don't trust myself at all when it comes to these things. In fact I don't trust the notion that 'If I do it it'll develop and if I don't do it, it won't develop.' I write, readers read. And that's the limit of my creative ambition. I haven't thought beyond this."

"How much have you thought about sex? Should there be a limit to sexual expression in literature? What do you think about this idea?" I try to explore Parijat inside out.

"As long as the writer is honest regarding sex while imagining the work. Sexual expression shouldn't be vulgar or obscene."

"To what extent...? Actually, what exactly is vulgarity and obscenity anyway?"

"It depends on the way words and language are used. If sex is described merely for arousal and entertainment, that's vulgarity and obscenity. Literature shouldn't be like that. But if the writer is very aware and the description regarding sex is sincere, then one can invent legitimate literature on sex. In fact, this is lacking in literature, this necessity in life. It's a problem."

"That's fine but sincerity! What kind of sincerity? Sincerity towards whom? Towards yourself? Towards society or towards those handful of readers?"

"Sincerity as in awareness; not towards society or readers but towards yourself."

Parijat's mother passed away when she was a little girl. But her large and prosperous family filled the gap left behind by her mother to some extent. Even so, from a young age, Parijat has been inclined to solitude. Gradually, family members started dying; her father started worrying. His medical practice, once successful, started to diminish. His faithlessness towards life increased; the household's wealth decreased. While growing up in this environment, Parijat's tendency to seek solitude became even greater.

Her grandfather had moved from Chainpur to Darjeeling; the granddaughter moved from Darjeeling to Kathmandu. Along with her were her younger sister Sukanya and her father, who had cut himself off from everything in life. The sisters enrolled themselves for further studies. Sukanya went to National College, Parijat to Padma Kanya. Both of them graduated and both stepped forward, prepared to work hard and struggle in order to survive.

Over time, Parijat's interest in religious texts deepened. Her study of Gita, Bible and Quran increased. Along with this growth in study, Parijat's faithlessness also increased and one day Parijat declared, "Faith is an experience that has no

identity.”

The flowers inside a vase close to Parijat’s bed have wilted. Sukanya is rearranging the bouquet brought by the boy earlier in the morning. These flowers are fresh; they are beautiful, an attempt to maintain meaning in Parijat’s life, just like the attempt made by Sirishko Phool.

I ask, “What do you think of Sirishko Phool?”

Sukanya lights a matchstick, Parijat blows out smoke, the smoke rises and colors the room.

Another puff of smoke escapes from Parijat’s mouth and so do these words, “There was no obligation for the philosophical ideas in Sirishko Phool to enter public life, but it did anyway. Now, there is that obligation. I’m proud of the fact that it shook traditional mindsets. I am also proud of Sirishko Phool for introducing an innovative way to write a novel in terms of language, style, plot and character presentation. I was already familiar with the idea that one ought to revolutionize novel-writing. Because no one has actually written a novel in Nepali. No one has the courage to write it, not even as much courage demonstrated by Suyogbir’s acceptance.”

Parijat continues to show her courage; Sukanya and I continue to listen. I have not been merely listening though; I also speak now and then, “Shankar Lamichhane’s preface to Sirishko Phool was controversial out there; do you agree with the preface?”

“I do. I had a wish to get Lamichhane-ji to write a preface to one of my novels, Uttam-ji. I got that wish fulfilled. Someone like Shankar Lamichhane tried to understand my sensibilities and wrote a thoughtful piece about me- that is a great honor. I also agree with his reasoning from a philosophical viewpoint.”

“What do you like writing the most- poems, stories or a novel?”

“Poems.”

“Whose work do you like?”

“I like poems written by Madan Regmi and Mohan Koirala. I also really enjoyed Bhupi’s poems, the ones he wrote when he was still dedicated to literature. When it comes to prose, I prefer Balkrishna Pokhrel, Shankar Lamichhane and Ramesh Bikal. Among those who are writing in innovative ways, I like Dhruba Chanda Gautam, Madan Regmi, and Prema Shah. The way Prema Shah presents her stories is comparable to any other internationally acclaimed writer.”

A cigarette gets lit again, smoke comes out of Parijat’s mouth again. Meanwhile, I resume reading, “I knew afterward that she was a very beautiful woman who preferred to live behind the curtain with her family

members and children, always fascinating the household affairs.” [An excerpt from Parijat’s autobiography, written in English]

This is a description of Parijat’s mother. Parijat’s description will also be similar. Gardening, embroidering, cooking, inviting people for meals - these are Parijat’s interests. She still pursues these interests, although infrequently, as long as her body lets her. Her mother had similar interests as well... And the daughter, just like her mother, is slender and beautiful. The smoke comes out again- this is Parijat’s current medium of entertainment. Actually this is not the only way she entertains herself. She also enjoys chitchatting, going for picnics into the woods and listening to music.

The sun has been getting stronger in Putali Sadak. Buses and cars zoom past, in competition with each other; the chirping of birds softens. But my voice is clear, “In your opinion, what is your most successful work?”

Parijat’s voice is clearer than mine, “Actually, I haven’t been successful at anything. But in terms of comparative success, I like my story Tiuriko Phool, Paeeriyako Gandha and when it comes to poems, I like Lahurelai Rogi Premikako Patra, Mrityuko Angaloma and Nasodha Ae Ghau. When I read these, I feel like I am really on my way to becoming a writer.”

“What are you planning to write now?”

“If I live, I would like to write one more novel. These days, I write narratives for the radio - at least that covers my cigarette expenses.”

This is Parijat’s life story. No, let’s not call this her life story; this is just a commentary. As Yevtushenko said it- “A poet’s autobiography is her poem. Apart from that, everything else is mere commentary.”

September 7, 1963

Parijat was a pen name chosen by the writer Bishnu Kumari Waiba. She was born in Darjeeling. She passed away on April 16, 1992 in Kathmandu at the age of 55. This is a translation by Niranjan Kunwar of an article from Uttam Kunwar’s anthology of interviews, Srastara Sahitya (Authors and Literature), published by the Uttam Kunwar Memorial Award Fund.

Translated BY
Niranjan KUNWAR

The Public Life of Women

Curated by Diwas Raja Kc and NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati

Research Fellows: Agastaya Thapa, Nisha Rai, Nikita Tripathi

To become public is to be seen and accounted for in history. The journey of Nepali women from within the boundaries of domesticity to the openness of public life is a move from obscurity to memory. This exhibition showcases materials gathered by Nepal Picture Library in its effort to create a dedicated women's archive. It rides on the feminist impulse to memorialize women's pasts in the belief that their historical visibility will advance the case for liberation.

This multi-part exhibition is an act of willing Nepali women en masse into public memory. It flashes instances from the past when women have taken on political struggle, addressed assemblies, paved new paths through education, published and shaped opinion, travelled and described the world, become figures of authority, and broken social norms. What we see is a view of how publicness itself has emerged as a key feminist strategy in Nepal.

The Feminist Memory Project – Nepal Picture Library

The Feminist Memory Project is a project by Nepal Picture Library that seeks to create a visual archive of women's movements in Nepal. Through gathered archival photographs, other documents and oral histories from around Nepal that capture women in pivotal moments of Nepali history, it consolidates contributions made by pioneering figures who remain marginalized in our male dominated historiographies.

The research for this project was made possible through support from Magnum Foundation.

From the time I began consciously working for gender justice, some 30 years back, Nepali women at large have taken stupendous strides! This time also correlates to when the 1990 People Movement 1 was in the simmering up to when this historically political event unfolded. An unprecedented number of women joined the movement to make it successful. In February 1996 the Maoists declared the armed revolution and a 10 years long civil war issued. Over 17,000 people lost their lives, hundreds of thousands were displaced, over 7000 women between the ages of 19 – 32 years were instantaneously widowed, and approximately 1400 disappeared. During the war itself, according to one of the leaders of the Maoist, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, the strength of the Maoists war came from some 40% representation of women in the Maoist guerilla. Today as Nepal transforms into a Republican State, there are also 40% women who have won elections at the local level.



From a predominantly patriarchal society where women had little education, health, and economic autonomy, to a space today where they play the key roles in the social, political and economic life is a very steep upward graph. During this relatively short period, rapid transitions into urbanization, modernization and the sheer forces of processes of globalization coupled with the political transitions in Nepal have played a key role in this. When men migrate in large numbers for work or fled the country during the war, women hold homes together, farm, and are the key economic providers. During the war and in post war transition times, they upheld the peace in their communities and it was because of their fortitude and ingenuity that their children and elders survived in a country where State safety nets are virtually not present.

Walking these times, I felt directly involved and engaged at the field level owing to the 2 organizations I founded. With Tewa, the Nepal women's fund (www.tewa.org.np) we built local philanthropy and made grants to organized groups of women throughout Nepal. It was started almost with premonitions that conditions will get harder for women, just before the Maoists took to the jungles in September 1995. This helped resource 100s of women's groups at the local level at a time when development work had come to a screeching halt. Nagarik Aawaz (www.nagarikaawaz.org.np) was founded in 2001 during escalating violence, just after the notorious palace massacre. Here, we worked at peace building with and through the youths, women, and the displaced community at large. Through both these work at empowering women, and peace building, I feel I have managed to feel the pulse of Nepali development at large and women's progress in specific.



Two important words for Nepal are "diverse" and "transition". Along with all else, Nepali women have undergone very rapid transitions during this timeframe and they are also very diverse and come from different realities associated with class, caste, ethnicity, geography and religion. So a blanket statement will not qualify, but at large we know that significant progress has been made despite the hardships of these times. Through Tewa and its ongoing work, which has supported over 485 women groups through over 640 programme in 69 districts of Nepal, we know that women are excelling in community managing roles, in taking leadership (55 women are elected at the local governance level from among the grantee groups), and in entrepreneurship development roles. Women also now have better access to education, health, and decision-making. Has the cost of doing this work been higher than had the transformation been at an incremental pace in stable times - we can only imagine and assess! But for sure the younger generation will not go backwards and progress for Nepali women is inevitable

where I pray the cost will be lesser in the future.

On the other hand especially through the ongoing peace building work with youth and women at Nagarik Aawaz, we know that the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons have not been very effective so far and have not been able to give justice to the people who have suffered the conflict. Besides, those affected children then, who are now young adults are still suffering the traumas of the past. Violence against women and children e.g. rape, is on the increase. Inflation experientially is at 15% making us economically poorer by the day. But the State is devolving into Provincial States and women are getting unprecedented opportunities in leadership and governance. However we also have to realize that decentralizing and institutionalizing with a weak and an unstable State machinery will be not easy, and women will inevitably have to carry the most brunt and costs.

Nevertheless, given women's own experience, strengths and wisdom - we have wonderful opportunities for women owing to the political change, and this means it is progress for all Nepalis. Will the responsible parties and the State also step up to invest, capacitate, and support the women in their forward journeys in meaningful ways, which can be truly felt by the women themselves?

Only time will tell!

THE CAGE: EXPERIMENTS OVER DOCUMENTATION / KATHMANDU (NEPAL)



PROJECT DOSSIER